

VIDEO

FAQ

Q Can I download video files from YouTube to my hard disk?

A It's certainly possible to download videos from YouTube to play later. This could be useful if you want to watch videos while not connected to the internet – when travelling, for example. There are plenty of websites that let you do just this, and these are easy enough to find via Google.

YouTube has been upgrading its video-sharing service since late last year. Many videos are now available in MP4 format at a resolution of 448x336 – instead of the original 320x240 – and audio quality has also been improved. Because of this, it's more tempting than ever to download YouTube content to your PC.

However, downloading videos in this manner contravenes YouTube's usage policies. You're not allowed to "access content through any technology or means other than the video playback pages of the website itself". This means downloading video files could get you into trouble. To be safe, you should only watch YouTube content directly from the website itself.

Seth Barton

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MYHOME247 Starter Kit

★★★★★

COMPUTER SHOPPER
BEST BUY

£250 inc VAT

From www.myhome247.co.uk

If you worry about your home when you're out, a home-monitoring service could help you relax. Myhome247 combines hardware sensors and an internet account to keep you informed of events in your absence. The Starter Kit consists of an IP network camera, a door sensor and a central control unit.

It's easy to set up, and anyone who's configured a wireless network will have no trouble. You'll need two spare Ethernet ports on your router, and more if you want to add extra cameras. After plugging the hardware into your router, simply log into your account at the Myhome247 website. It quickly registers your devices, and you can rename them if desired. There's a wide range of optional extras, such as motion sensors and alarms. The sensors are wireless and communicate directly with the control unit. The cameras have wired network connections, so you'll need to use Powerline networking if you want them in different rooms.

You can access your account from any computer with an internet connection. The main interface is easy to use and gives you lots of options. You can create macros to link one device to another. For example, you can set the camera to start recording if the front door sensor is triggered. You can also program times when the system will automatically activate and deactivate, or control the activation of individual devices manually. Any report from a sensor or camera is logged on your account as an alert.

The service can email you alerts; you select which ones, and how often. Alternatively, you can buy SMS credits for 15p each and receive selected alerts directly to your mobile phone. You can view a camera's live feed on a Java-compatible mobile phone using a downloadable program. You'll

SUMMARY

- ✓ Easy to set up and configure
- ✓ Wide range of available sensors
- ✗ Low-resolution images

HOME-MONITORING KIT VGA IP camera, door/window sensor and control unit. Requires a broadband internet connection and two free Ethernet ports on the router
PART CODE MH247S
DETAILS www.myhome247.co.uk



have to pay your operator's rates for the data received, and video played at about 1fps on our GPRS handset. The mobile program also lets you activate and deactivate individual devices remotely.

The supplied Panasonic BL-C1 camera can take photos or video when it detects movement. Alternatively, you can watch a live video stream via your account. Despite the camera being capable of a 640x480 resolution, pictures and video are limited to a resolution of 320x240. This keeps bandwidth down for those with slow connections and mobile phone users, but we would have liked the option to use the maximum resolution. The kit comes with 5MB of data storage for free. Additional storage is expensive, though, at £10 a month for 50MB, or £12 a month for 250MB.

Using this Starter Kit alone, you're likely to be bombarded with alerts from both the camera and door sensor, as they have no way of discerning family members from intruders. You could set up timers on your devices to avoid some of these alerts, but you're

better off buying a Keypad Kit for £26 including VAT. This will let you disarm all devices before entering the property.

This home-monitoring service is easy to set up and keeps you well informed. The only downsides are the low image resolution and expensive storage upgrades. The kit price is reasonable, and it's useful to have a single support number to call should anything go wrong.

Seth Barton

Also consider...

TERRATEC Cinergy DT USB XS Diversity

★★★★★

COMPUTER SHOPPER
BEST BUY

£58 inc VAT

From www.pixmania.co.uk

This USB TV tuner has a diversity mode that takes a signal from two tuners and aerials to improve reception in areas with weak signal strength. Alternatively, you can use the tuners independently to receive one programme while recording another.

The included software is easy to use, image quality is good, and the remote control is clearly labelled.

Terratec's XS Diversity is the best dual tuner we've seen.



USB TV TUNER USB2 interface, dual digital tuners, 2x RF inputs
PART CODE 10456 DETAILS <http://uk.terratec.net> FULL REVIEW Apr 2007

TOP UP TV TUTV Anytime DTR

★★★★★

COMPUTER SHOPPER
BEST BUY

£90 (160GB) or
£130 (250GB) inc VAT

From www.topuptv.com

This hard disk Freeview recorder has twin tuners, so you can watch one programme while recording another. Two models are currently available, with a choice of a 160GB or 250GB hard disk, storing around 100 and 150 hours of TV respectively.

As well as the usual Freeview broadcasts, you can choose to subscribe to Top Up TV programming or Setanta Sports. It's a versatile and inexpensive way of improving your TV viewing.



HARD DISK RECORDER 2x digital tuners, 160GB hard disk, RF input, RF output, 2x SCART, S-video, composite, stereo phono and coaxial S/PDIF output PART CODE DT1 6300-16
DETAILS www.topuptv.com FULL REVIEW Jul 2007

COMPRO

VideoMate Vista T750F



£50 inc VAT

From www.ebuyer.com

Most dual-tuner TV cards have a PCI-Express interface. However, some PCs don't have the requisite PCI-Express x1 slot, or the only such slot is blocked by a large graphics card. Compro's VideoMate Vista T750F has a PCI interface and should fit in almost any PC.

The Vista T750F's dual tuners are hybrid, so they can receive either digital or analogue broadcasts. It's ideal if you're waiting for the digital TV switchover. As there are two tuners, you can record one programme while watching another, or record two programmes at once. As with most hybrid TV cards, it can receive FM radio and capture analogue video.

The Vista T750F is best suited to media centre use, so the bundled Media Center remote is a handy addition. However, it's ugly and not as comfortable to hold as Microsoft's more curvaceous version. A small IR receiver connects to the back of the card, but it doesn't include an IR blaster to control a set-top box. If you don't have a PC with Media Center, you're stuck with Compro's own DTV application. This has a very poor interface by comparison, with fiddly buttons, confusing icons and an EPG that only displays one multiplex of channels at a time. A better option for those without Media Center is Terratec's Cinergy DT USB XS Diversity (see 'Also consider...' below).

As with all digital tuners, picture quality is dependent on the MPEG2 codec used rather than the card itself. The supplied codec produced good-quality images and the tuners were sensitive enough to pick up a consistently good signal from our



aerial. No mini antennas are supplied and, sadly, it doesn't support diversity mode, where both tuners are used for one channel to improve reception in areas with poor signal strength.

It's possible to connect the Vista T750F to your PC's power button. The Compro DTV software can then power up your PC for recordings and shut it down again afterwards, and you can import scheduling information from Media Center to make things easier. You might make some power savings, but they will probably be minimal, as your PC should hibernate between recordings anyway.

The card has two separate RF inputs and a simple adaptor is provided to connect an aerial cable to both at once. There are S-video and composite inputs for capturing analogue video from camcorders and VCRs, plus a mini-jack for audio capture. Ulead's DVD MovieFactory 5 SE is included for editing your footage and burning it to DVD. Video captured from the S-video input and converted to MPEG2 looked reasonable, but you'll get sharper results from a hardware encoder such as TerraTec's Grabster AV 400 MX.

The Vista T750F is a versatile product, and a bargain considering it comes with a remote. The DTV software is poor, however, and so we cannot recommend it to anyone without Media Center. Still, Vista Home Premium users need look no further for an internal TV tuner.

Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Dual hybrid tuners
- ✓ PCI interface
- ✗ Poor tuner software

INTERNAL TV TUNER Dual analogue/digital tuner, PCI interface, 2x RF, FM, S-video, composite, mini-jack audio-in and IR inputs
PART CODE T750F
DETAILS www.comprousa.com

CHOOSING A...
TV Card

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

INTERFACE: USB or PCI
TUNER: Digital or hybrid
INPUTS: Radio frequency (RF)
CAPTURE FORMAT: MPEG2
HARDWARE COMPRESSION: No
Recommended minimum in grey

1 TV cards connect to PCs through a variety of interfaces. Internal cards fit into PCI or PCI-E x1 slots. External devices with USB interfaces are easier to install, but use up a USB port. USB stick and PC Card versions are also available and are ideal for notebooks.

2 Most devices only tune to digital TV broadcasts, but hybrid tuners can receive analogue broadcasts as well. Terrestrial digital TV, or Freeview as it's commonly known, provides extra free channels, but you can't access subscription channels with a TV tuner card.

Analogue broadcasts can give a superior picture to digital broadcasts, but digital tuners don't suffer from noise and ghosting when reception is poor. You can check the digital reception in your area at www.freeview.co.uk. Remember that analogue broadcasts are being phased out, so analogue-only tuners are a poor choice.

3 Basic devices provide an RF input for connecting an aerial. To connect an analogue video device, such as a camcorder or VCR for video capture, you should look for a composite or, preferably, S-video input. Digital tuners tend not to include this feature. Buy a hybrid device if you want to receive digital TV and capture analogue video.

4 If you want to use your PC for video editing or as a digital video recorder, you'll need to capture video in an appropriate compression format. The most practical format is MPEG2, which gives excellent quality and reasonable file sizes.

Digital TV is broadcast in MPEG2 format, which makes recording to disk easy. Expect an hour of MPEG2 video to take up roughly 1.5GB of hard disk space.

5 Most TV tuners come with their own software for watching TV and scheduling recordings. Many tuners are also compatible with the excellent Windows Media Center, which is included with the Home Premium and Ultimate versions of Windows Vista.

SLING MEDIA
Slingbox Pro

£160 inc VAT

From www.lambda-tek.com/componentshop

The Slingbox Pro allows you to watch TV anywhere in the world as if you were sitting in your own living room. It streams video from your home over broadband, so you'll need an upload speed of at least 256Kbit/s. Alternatively, you can stream video across your home network.

It has component, SCART and S-video inputs, so you can plug in whichever set-top boxes you want, including HD sources up to 1080i. It also has a built-in Freeview tuner. This is a great device for TV fans who travel regularly.

VIDEO-STREAMING DEVICE Component, SCART and S-video inputs, Freeview tuner, IR transmitter, 10/100 Ethernet port
PART CODE SB200-110 DETAILS www.slingmedia.com
FULL REVIEW Jan 2008

NETGEAR
EVA8000

£188 inc VAT

From www.lambda-tek.com/componentshop

The EVA8000 uses your home network to stream media files from your PC, so you can enjoy them on your living room TV. It also accesses content from internet sites such as YouTube and Flickr.

It supports all the main photo, audio and video file formats. It also has a wide range of video and audio outputs, including HDMI. Image and video quality are good and it's easy to use, too.



STREAMING MULTIMEDIA RECEIVER HDMI, component, SCART, S-video, composite, stereo phono, optical S/PDIF outputs, 10/100 Ethernet and 802.11b/g wireless networking
PART CODE EVA8000-100UKS DETAILS www.netgear.co.uk
FULL REVIEW Jun 2008